



Art as Compost for Compassion

9/21/2016

0 Comments

The Empowering Clerks Network is about to launch a new political campaign, promoting the use of participatory artworks by the US Department of State and various forces of the Military Industry Complex (resulting in an average saving of approx. \$347 a year to each individual taxpayer) as an alternative to drone warfare. The Center for Supportive Bureaucracy will offer US Government to promote use of compassionate art abroad and in US soil in order answer some of the needs of the American people. As part of our research effort in writing the new policy proposal we interviewed artist [Paul Ramirez Jonas](#), creator of [Public Trust](#), a social practice work that was recently presented in 3 different locations in Boston. Together with thirteen Boston performers, Ramirez Jonas presented a billboard of constantly changing pledges – yours, mine, scientists, and those of our presidential candidates, making a piece of art about promises, those contracts we with make with each other and with ourselves, and the potent speech acts that keep a society together.

Here's an interview with Ramirez Jonas:

What inspired you to create Public Trust?

I tend to work iteratively and slowly. I make similar pieces, or pieces that build on each other even if that is not superficially obvious. I have been using speech acts as the basis for participatory pieces that are based on some sort of exchange. I often think that if I want to make situations that require an exchange with the public I am limited by what the public has on them at all times: spare change, keys, phone, IDs, credit cards, money, their name, their voice, etc. Thus I have used the participants voice quite a bit. Two years ago I made a modest piece also called Public Trust that asked for people to give me lies that I would then notarize and turn into truths. The piece was very successful but I began to think that there was no consequence to it. It was a little too playful, you could get away with anything. Thus I began to think of promises and promissory statements as having more inner tension since they could become lies or facts depending on the future actions of the participant. I also liked the religious, ethical, and societal implications of promises. Finally, in that serendipitous way in which making art happens, I was also reading Agamben's tremendous book, *the sacrament of language, an archeology of the oath*, and that sort of sealed the deal.

Your project provides a service, offering community and participants a reflection of their promises together with other public promises. What were the most inspiring or interesting promises (or combinations of the private and public ones) so far?

I know it sounds trite, but I really do like them all. I think my standouts are the ones where how it happened was significant. I had two instances of two very different but very hostile participants who yelled at me, questioned the work, were openly belligerent who walked away without participating. Only to, in both cases, come back two days later and make a promise.)
(As seen in the video, one of the ways to make a promise was with an official pinkie promise O.A.)



Play

In a recent interview Marina Abramovic said that in the last ten years people stopped asking her 'why is this art?', and the public now accepts performance art as a 'valid' form of art. However, social practice artists still face the exact same question. How often do people ask you that question, and how do you respond to it?

I am rarely asked that question. I strive to create a meaningful experience based on fairly familiar modes of operation. In other words, when I show outside of museums and galleries, I base my work on modes of operation that are pertinent to those public spaces and experiences. I want to make situations where people participate because they find them meaningful, engaging and accessible – not because they are art. It is important to me that it be art, but it is not important to me that it be perceived as art by the participant – unless it helps the interaction. I think that because of this when I am asked if my work is art, it is more often than not a question that comes out of curiosity, not out of doubt. "By the way, is this art?", versus, suspicious looks "is this art?"

What is your promise?

It is based on a quote by Michael Barenbaum who said: **"Try not to be a perpetrator. Try not to be a bystander. Try not to be a victim."** My promise is to try not to be a bystander.

What is your favorite artwork (or a few if you can't name only one)

[Tania Bruguera's Immigrant Movement International](#)

[Pablo Helguera's The he School of Panamerican Unrest](#)

[Jon Rubin and Dawn Weleski's Conflict Kitchen](#)

[Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July's Learning to Love You More](#)

[Merle Laderman Ukeles' Touch Sanitation](#)

[Mel Chin's Revival Field and The Name of the Place](#)

[Suzanne Lacy's The Oakland Projects](#)

[Pedestal of the World by Piero Manzoni](#)

[Joseph Beuys 7000 Oaks – City Forestation Instead of City Administration](#)

[On Kawara's date paintings](#)

Both Public Trust and the ECN use objects and methods of the authority and legal system, which many people feel disempowered or even threatened by. Was it part of your choice of using these tools?

Yes, because for better or for worse these are systems that we know how to interact with. A form is easier to interact with than a blank piece of paper. And if you use it well it is more generous than the illusion of freedom that a blank page gives.

Do you have any hopes or fantasies about Public Trust in many other locations around the country and the world, or of such projects being a service that actual government offer to citizens?

I have collaborated with city governments in at least two projects and it was extremely rewarding. I have a high degree of respect for civil servants... 99% of the time they really get that they are in charge of our commons.

Thank you!!

Until the CSB starts its extensive collaboration with the Military Industry Complex, here is another beautiful bureaucratic art that inspired me a lot, the short movie *Validation* and the winner of the ECN Awards of 2016, the *Yes Men NYT Hoax* (both I think are masterpieces in their beauty, inspiration, humor and intrinsic truths they make us see)

Leave a Reply.

Center for Supportive Bureaucracy - Empowering Clerks Network issuing official documents since 2006. Joy Permits, Forgiver's License (Class A & B), Refurbished Report Cards, OK Parent Awards, DIY Certificates of Recognition, Loving & Liable Entity (LLE) certification, Apology Declarations, Learner's Permits, Open Carry permit for musical instruments, Validation Tickets, True Friend Diploma, Aunt & Uncle Adoption certificates, Pain Deeds, Clown Visa, Free-Play Admission Tickets, custom made official documents for specific needs, documents issuing events.

We would love to have you visit soon!

Hours

M-F: 9am - 5pm